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Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2009

Seniors connect to services at health forum

Event hosted by Berliner is third targeting older adults

by Andrew Ujifusa | Staff Writer



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Jim Hathaway had his blood pressure taken on Friday and discovered that it was a little higher than usual. But he had an easy explanation.

"I love the wrong kinds of foods," chuckled Hathaway, a Bethesda resident.

But trying to find answers and helpful advice to deal with his mother's Alzheimer's disease also drew Hathaway to the free health forum for seniors hosted by County Councilman Roger Berliner at Sunrise at Fox Hill senior living center in Bethesda on a rainy Friday afternoon.

The forum, also sponsored by the Montgomery County Commission on Aging, was themed "Feeling Your Best at Any Age" and was designed to provide information on various topics and highlight resources available to the county's seniors. Representatives from a variety of health and wellness groups attended, including National Council on Patient Information and Education, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Parkinson Foundation and the Jewish Social Service Agency.

Berliner's two previous public forums for seniors have focused on financial security and safety, and housing issues.

"We're talking about mental health issues too, and it's a taboo subject for many," said Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac at the forum.

Shelly Edwards, a community services manager with the Alzheimer's Association who leads a support group for Fox Hill residents, said sometimes it's difficult to get people to stop being afraid of having a disease and getting them to talk to her. Answering very basic questions also takes up a lot of Edwards' time, especially for those

seniors who think any loss of memory and increasing forgetfulness is entirely normal.

"It is a disease. It is not normal," Edwards said.

Although she didn't have any personal reason for coming, Natalie Spickler of North Bethesda said her neighbor invited her



Laurie DeWitt/The Gazette
Dr. Gloria Eng (left) a resident of the Sunrise at Fox Hill senior community, talks with Lou Nistler, executive director of the Parkinson Foundation of the National Capital Area, at a senior health forum hosted by Fox Hill in Bethesda on Friday afternoon.

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to come along.

Even without a personal need, just talking to organizations for seniors and learning about what's available to them is helpful. Neighbors who she knows should be getting their groceries delivered, for example, could be helped by the forum's resources.

"You can pass the information on to someone else," Spickler said.

Those interested in more information can call the county's Commission on Aging at 240-777-1120.

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